

Student Submission - TEF 2023

Approach to evidence-gathering

St Mellitus College is a national theological college. It was established in 2007 and comprises of four different centres located across England. The college offers students full-time and part-time courses that combine rich theological training alongside on-the-ground work experience. At the time of writing, St Mellitus has approximately 500 students enrolled, including those who are unaccredited. The student age ranges from 18-73 years old, highlighting that it is a college that appeals to mature students and therefore it makes for an eclectic study body. St Mellitus collects a reasonable amount of data from its students considering its small size, however, there is a limitation to the sources of evidence for this submission. One of the main reasons for this is due to there being no Student Union, and therefore no elected students at the college. Therefore, as the student authors of this report, we were unable to collect specialised data. However, we have been able to draw from other sources that provide a rich overview and are highly representative of the experience and outcomes of all students at St Mellitus College. These sources include National Student Surveys, Regulatory Returns, HESA AP Returns, and Internal Student Surveys. These internal surveys include New Student Surveys, End of Year Student Surveys, and specific Module Feedback. The date range of the data engaged is from start-of-year 2018 to end-of-year 2022. To gather the data, we met with the St Mellitus Academic Manager who sent us the data required to write the submission. They answered our questions regarding how the data had been collected and assisted us in the interpretation of the data. This was the extent of the college's involvement in the submission; as such, this is solely students' work. This submission is authored by three students, who met together online to discuss how this work would be put together, thereby maintaining the independence of this submission. As the three authors, we can confirm that the college did not unduly influence the content of the submission. We are confident we have submitted a report that is representative of the student's voice across the four centres and offers insight into the experience and outcomes of students at St Mellitus College.

Student experience

The teaching, feedback and assessment practices at St Mellitus College support students' learning, progression, and attainment. The data suggests that students are satisfied with the teaching and assessment support given to them. This is demonstrated in the feedback received in one survey which was the CASS survey data from across the college. There were high levels of satisfaction regarding teaching, where across the college centres students reported agreeing that the staff were good at explaining content, were pivotal in motivating students and that their assessments helped them to develop.

The course content and delivery at St Mellitus College engages the students in their learning and stretches them to develop their knowledge and skills. The data collected in the CASS survey paints a clear picture of student satisfaction in terms of the content they are receiving as part of their course. The average score of 4.18 (out of 5) indicates that on average the student population agrees that their course is well organised and runs smoothly. A similar score was communicated regarding the question of the coherence of the course (4.18). Significantly, an average score of 4.28 responded regarding the question of how the course related to life and ministry. Finally of note regarding the empirical data, was an average score of 4.3 that was recorded regarding the course preparing them for vocation.

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Due to the nature of the focus of the college being on theological education, there is minimal empirical data that can be provided in to display how far research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice, and employer engagement contributes to students' experience. However, students are taught by academics who are often engaged in either or both real-life ministry experience or active scholarly research around the topics they teach. Staff at the college have published a total of 14 books since 2020.

Again, due to the nature of the focus of the college on theology, there is minimal empirical data that can be provided to display how well the college supports staff professional development and academic practice. However, the college does seek to build a culture of research amongst its teaching staff. Staff are given research leave to engage in scholarly research. Staff are also given the opportunity to develop through the Durham University Learning and Teaching Award (DELTA) to further their professional development.

St Mellitus College has curated a highly supportive learning environment and students are enabled to access the academic support they require. The National Student Survey data demonstrates that students consistently recorded high levels of satisfaction regarding access to academic support. In 2021, just over 89% of students who completed the survey recorded that they could contact staff when needed, and this figure rose to 94% in 2022. In addition, 83% of students believed they had sufficient advice available to them regarding their course. Even though the satisfaction rate fell by 4% between 2021 and 2022, the figure was still above the national average by 10%.

The college provides physical and virtual learning resources to support teaching and learning. National Student Survey data demonstrate that in 2021 and 2022, over 80% of students believed that the IT resources and facilities provided them with the support they needed to learn well. A significant proportion, 67% in 2022 and 68% in 2021 agreed that the library resources supported their learning well. Once again, the proportions were high regarding the question of whether people felt they had access to course-specific resources when they needed them, the figures were 74% in 2021 and 70% in 2022.

St Mellitus College engages with students to enable improvements to their experiences and outcomes. When asked in the National Student Survey in 2021, 90% of students believed that they had the right to opportunities to give feedback on their course. In addition, 86.3% felt that the staff valued their opinions on the courses that they were studying. A slightly lower but still significant proportion of the student population, at 75%, felt that it was clear how their feedback had been acted on. These figures were slightly adjusted in the National Student Survey results of 2022, this figure was maintained as a high one in that 92% of students agreed that they had the opportunity to provide feedback on their course. Similarly, there was an increase in the students agreeing that the staff valued their views and opinions with the figure increasing to 88%. There was however a reduction in the number of students who agreed that there was clarity on how their feedback was acted on, which is displayed in the figure of 54%. Overall, it was clear that students believe that they have opportunities to provide feedback and that this feedback is valued.

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Student Outcomes

Positive outcomes

St Mellitus college supports its students to succeed and progress in their studies. In 2022 97% of students reported that their course provided by St Mellitus College was intellectually stimulating, this is an increase of just over 2% from 2021. Moreover, from 2020 to 2022 96% of students surveyed reported staff were good at explaining the material. From 2020 to 2022 87% of those surveyed said the teaching they received at St Mellitus has challenged them to achieve their best work. Moreover, 94% of those surveyed during this period reported that they felt their course provided opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth. Overall, between 2020 to 2022 of those surveyed, 93% reported a positive teaching outcome in all modes and levels of teaching to support them to succeed and progress. 85% of St Mellitus students surveyed over four centres said that assessments undertaken had helped them learn and develop.

The students at St Mellitus College show good rates of continuation and completion. Since the college's last TEF submission in 2019, 96% of 470 full-time students continued to study within the college, and 92% of 250 students completed their course with an accredited award. 95% of 160 students progressed their study at St Mellitus. For part-time students, 92.5% of 160 students continued to study, and 82.7% of 50 students completed their course with an accredited award. 83.8% of 80 students progressed in their studies at the college. Further, the non-continuation of student study at St Mellitus college shows 3% (17 of 550) in 2019, 1.8% (10 of 557), 1.3% (7 of 557) and 3.1% (15 of 481) in 2022.

The student's progression rates to skilled employment, further study or other positive outcomes are excellent. According to *Discover Uni* data for 2018-2020, 95% of St Mellitus students go on to work and/or study, of which 85% are welfare professionals, 5% are managers, directors, and senior officials, and 5% welfare and housing associate professionals. 100% of St Mellitus graduates find their current work meaningful. 100% of students surveyed said they were utilising what they had learnt during their studies in their current work. And 100% said their current work fits with their future plans.

Educational gains

St Mellitus College intends relevant educational gains for its students and its educational aims are twofold, as specified in the Durham common awards programme for BA (Hons) in Theology, Ministry and Mission:

1. To prepare people for professional ministry and mission within churches.
2. To prepare people for lay ministry and mission in the world.

The college aims to provide theological education to equip Christian disciples and ministers to develop as competent and faithful reflective practitioners.

We have measured St Mellitus' intention by how academically equipped its students to serve Christ in the Church and the world. As such, 85% reported the content of their course related to their life and ministry, with a further 90% reporting that their course had helped prepare them for their vocation (of whatever kind). Additionally, 90% of students reported that the placements they had undertaken as part of their award have helped them to learn and develop. Overall, 86% were satisfied with the quality of their training.

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The college supports its students to achieve educational gains. The Durham training programme focuses on Subject Specific Knowledge and Skills to enable critical thinking across the many activities of Christian discipleship, of which 94.5% surveyed at St Mellitus between 2020 to 2022 reported their course provided them with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics, with this year, 2022 being the highest with 96%. Another learning outcome specified by the Durham Common Award scheme is that of Key Skills, where the application of training is measured through the application of learning, of which 91% of students surveyed between 2020 to 2022 said their course provided opportunities to apply what they had learnt. Of those surveyed between 2020 to 2022, 86% reported good academic support.

St Mellitus evaluates and demonstrates the gains made by its students through vocational and personal development. The college demonstrates the gains made by students in part by employment, although it must be understood that many that study at the college as part of their vocation are working as volunteers. Of those who graduated during 2018-2020 the 30 people surveyed, half replied that the average wage after 15 months was £25,000, which is £1000 over the national average. Educational gains in academic and personal development and work readiness (such as teamworking) can be evaluated from students' positive comments around these areas. St Mellitus received 73 positive student comments relating to aspects of training, of which some comments encompassed more than one aspect; 43 students commented positively about the academic teaching and staff, with 7 specifically commenting positively about their gained capability for critical thinking. 35 students commented positively regarding the learning community, with 13 commenting positively about their formation and formation group, indicative that they had grown personally and valued team working. Positive comments such as "Being challenged to think critically and gain new perspectives," and "Integration of modules and reality of ministry," show that training at St Mellitus is preparing people for professional ministry and mission within churches and the world according to the Durham common awards program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, students have a very positive experience studying at St Mellitus College. They are highly supported in their academic journey and have many opportunities to give feedback, helping to increase the sense of support and positive experience. However, some improvement is required by the college to display how the feedback that is given is being acted upon. On the whole students have adequate access to the course materials, with developments being made in making more resources accessible online due to many students living a distance away from one of the four centres and their subsequent libraries. Teaching staff are also well supported and given opportunities to develop academically and professionally during their time teaching at the college. St Mellitus College unequivocally prepares students for life after their studies. This is clear from positive feedback on experience but also when compared to the Durham common awards programme. The college provides high-quality education, and many students are inspired by the teaching provided, gaining, and developing academic skills such as critical thinking, as well as teamwork skills. This positively impacts their experience following their time at the college. St Mellitus is a college that offers the opportunity to study theology in a practical, supportive, and positive environment and is accessible to people from a wide range of ages, promoting how studying can be engaged with at all stages of life.